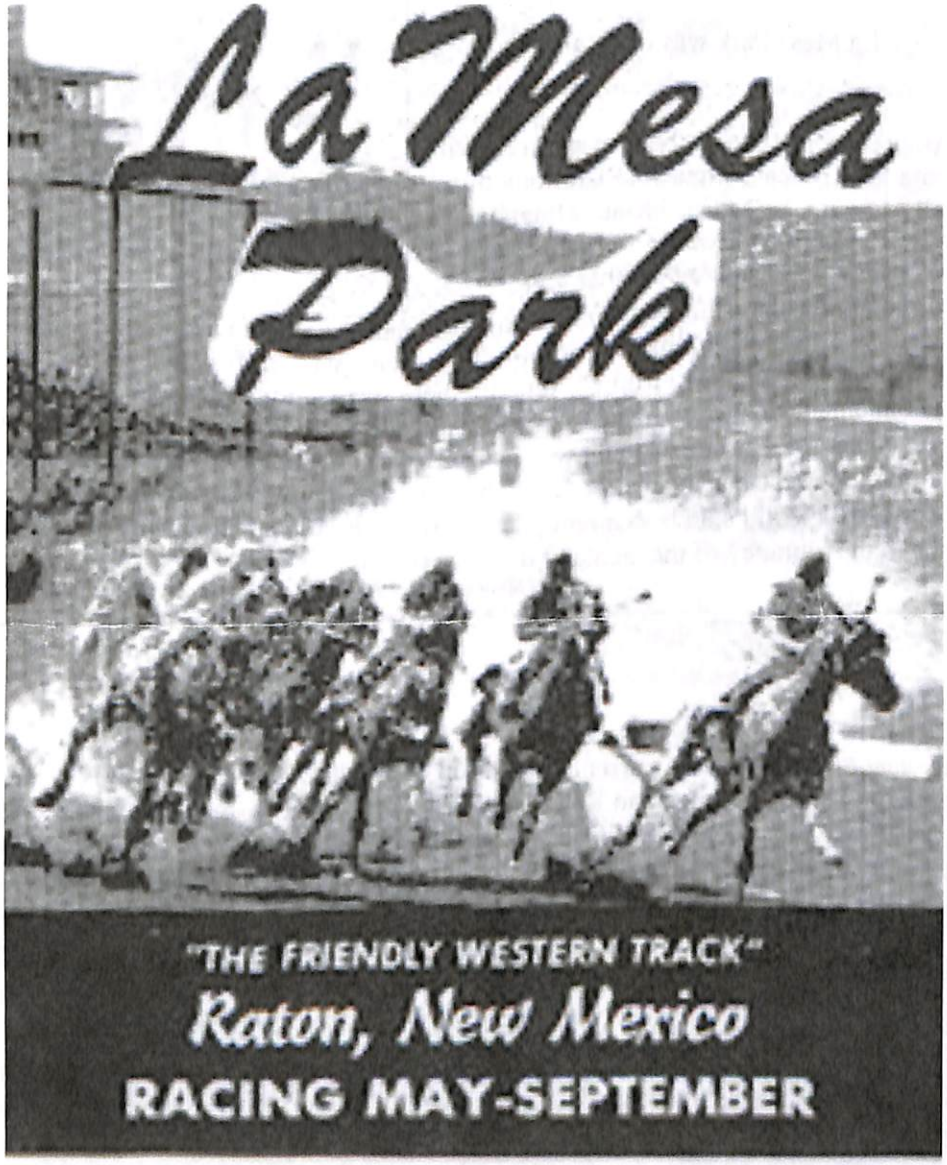
TAFT TALK

No. 72 *Newsletter of the Taft Family Association* **Jun 2017**



La Mesa Park advertisement

Source: www.horseracing-tracks.com

The Neutral Strip or No-Man's Land in Indian Territory, OK – Home of the Tafts

The exciting and difficult years of homesteading in Oklahoma during the late 1800s came vividly to life in letters and lengthy accounts happily written and preserved by the Taft family of Oklahoma.

New member, John Robert Taft, has sent us on an odyssey of adventure and excitement in the new territory of red earth, blue sky, vast vistas, oil, tornadoes and cattle ranching. Follow the family through the pages of this issue and earlier TTTs: # 7 Dec 1984, # 12 May 1987, # 22 May 1992.

See p. 3 The Neutral Strip

Thoughts from TTT headquarters

It's wonderful when we get new members – people who share our interest in the Taft family and lend us insight into their world. It's also terrific to hear from our long-standing members and discover what is new in their families' lives.

LA MESA PARK

As you will learn in the next few pages, La Mesa Park was integral to the lives of the Taft family of Oklahoma.

La Mesa Park, located in Raton, NM, opened in 1946 as the first racetrack in New Mexico. It was an open air racing facility featuring a seven-furlong dirt oval. The grandstand, which originally stood near Dallas, TX at Arlington Downs, was dismantled and brought to Raton. It had seating for 3,000, the clubhouse an additional 586 and the Turf Club Restaurant another 400. The track had stalls for 1,033 horses. The town had a railroad which brought in fans from TX, OK, and KS. Later one of the special features of La Mesa Park was an adjoining airport built for private plane traffic. One of the advertising slogans was "park your car or your plane at La Mesa." Actually there seemed to be a strong presence of clients from Kansas and especially Oklahoma, as La Mesa hosted futurities and derbys for these states. La Mesa Park because of its location did not seem to be part of a circuit. Racing was a mixed Thoroughbred, Quarter Horse meet that ran from mid-Spring to late Summer. La Mesa has the distinction of having the highest elevation of any American racetrack at 7,834 feet. La Mesa Park still stands as a reminder, particularly to our Taft family members, of an era that was of great importance to the vibrancy of the area and their livelihood.

Source: *www.horseracing-tracks.com: No Second Chance! 2008*

RATON, NM

Raton [Ra-TONE], NM is the county seat of Colfax with a current population of about 6,000 residents. It is located in northeastern New Mexico just south of the Raton Range and Raton Peak. The range is a 75-mile long ridge that extends east from the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Raton Pass itself was used for centuries by the Native Americans and later Spanish explorers to cut through the Rocky Mountains but was too rough for wagons on the Santa Fe Trail. In 1877 the post office was named Willow Springs, a stop on the Santa Fe Trail, but in 1879 it was changed to Otero and finally in 1880 became Raton. In 1879 the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway established a rail line and the town developed into a railroad, coal mining, and ranching center for the northeast corner of New Mexico.

Among its attractions, Raton is known in geology for viewing the K-T or K-Pg Boundary or the Iridiium layer. "There is a well-preserved sequence of rocks spanning the Cretaceous–Paleogene boundary in Climax Canyon Park, a Raton city park to the west of town [Coordinates: 36°54′13.99″N 104°27′0.75″W]… The rocks have been studied for evidence of the iridium anomaly cited as evidence of a large meteorite impact at the end of the Cretaceous. It is interpreted to have caused the Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event which killed off non-avian dinosaurs, as well as many other species of flora and fauna 65 million years ago. The K-T Boundary is represented in the rock strata by a 1-cm thick tonstein clay layer which has been found to contain anomalously high concentrations of iridium."

Other attractions include Sugarite Canyon State Park about 12 miles northeast of Raton at an elevation of 8,800 feet. The NRA Whittington Center is located 15 miles southwest of Raton and is the largest NRA shooting range in the country. Raton was the site of New Mexico's first horse racetrack, La Mesa Park, which closed in 1992. On a different note, Raton was mentioned in Jack Kerouac's novel On The Road.

Source: enwikipedia.org

The Neutral Strip or No-Man's Land in Indian Territory OK – Home of the Tafts

John Robert Taft is a new member of the TFA and has sent along some fascinating information on his family. Many of us have lived in suburban or urban centers in the country and have not had the opportunity to experience a more rural setting particularly in the amazing land of the American southwest, especially Oklahoma. John states that he was born in Colorado Springs, CO in 1957 and "grew up in cow camps." When he reached high school he still worked on anches and with Thoroughbred race horses. He worked on ranches in TX, OK and IA for the first thirty years. For the next thirty years he has been an animal control officer for the city of Raton. John has sent us information on his extended family's life in the world of ranches and thoroughbred horses which you will find throughout this issue of TTT.

He also enclosed a brief note sent to his parents upon his own birth as follows:

> *"Dearest Ester wrote me of your ideal little son which I am very proud to be his great-great aunt. So fortunate there was the incubator to bring him thru nicely. Lost my little Aquila (named for my grandfather) Taft because of [cant read] when he was born prematurely. He lived 27 hours. Was under 7 mos gestation.... John Robert, an appropriate name for the baby - as there were Johns and the first in America was Robert Taft... no particular news, will Say Bye, Bye, Great Aunt Alice."*

This Great Aunt Alice was Alice Gertrude Taft Earl who wrote a 28 page history of 'My Early Life" presented in 1962 at the GIG-BAR reunion when she was 84. She had come to No-Man's Land with her parents Wallace and Lydia Taft when she was 8 and was responsible for later bringing her grandfather Aquilla Ramsdell Taft from IL to live with them in OK for almost 7 years until his death.

John Robert Taft was the son of Clyde Stevens (John McKinley, John Whitcomb, Wallace Whitcomb, Aquilla Ramsdell, James Sibley, Nathan, Daniel, Daniel, Robert) Taft. Other Taft members, also descendants of Wallace Whitcomb, included Mindy Chesney, Leonard C. Taft and Mary Walden Curtis.

2. Clyde Stevens Taft (father of John Robert Taft) was born 30 Jan 1930 in Harper Co., CO, son of John McKinley and Esta Mae (Stevens) Taft, and died 1 Sep 1993 probably in Walsenburg, CO. He was buried in La Veta Cemetery, La Veta, CO, his gravestone stating "A Cowboy at Rest." He married Dorothy Jean Evans, born in 1929, daughter of John and Elsie (Stevens) Evans, and died in 1998. Clyde Stevens and Dorothy Jean (Evans) Taft had the following children: George, James "Jim", John Robert, and William "Bill" Taft. Clyde Stevens Taft married (2) Annie (--) Wiseman of Trinidad, CO who had a son Lee Don Wiseman.

In 1930 the family lived in Blue Grass, Beaver, OK and in 1940 they were in Otto, Harper, OK. According to his obituary he was a cowboy, horseman and rancher. He and his wife Annie operated "HORSES."

2. John McKinley "Johnny" Taft (father of Clyde Stevens Taft) was born 3 Nov 1900 in Beaver Co., OK, son of John Whitcomb and Mary Amelia "Amelia" (Stanley) Taft, and died 24 Apr 1994 in La Veta, CO. He was buried in La Veta Cemetery, La Veta, CO. He married Esta Mae Stevens 6 Sep 1922 in Beaver Co., OK. Esta Mae Stevens was born 7 Jul 1905 in IA, daughter of Isaac Elmer and Nancy Elizabeth (Perden) Stevens, and died in Feb 1973 in La Veta, OK. She was buried in La Veta Cemetery, La Veta, CO. John McKinley "Johnny" and Esta Mae (Stevens) Taft had the following children: Laura Fae, **Clyde Stevens (see above)**, Len Vernon Taft and Alice Carol Taft.

See p. 6 for No-Man's Land cont)

In Memoriam:

Dorothy Detta (Taft) Grossman

Our condolences to the extended Grossman family on the loss of their mother, grandmother and aunt.

Dorothy Detta (Taft) Grossman was born 18 Feb 1915 in Tidioute, PA, daughter of Franklin Henry "Frank" and Laura (Martin) Taft, and died 23 Jun 2017 in New Port Richey, FL. Dorothy graduated from Frewsburg, NY High School in 1934. She married Wesley LeRoy "Tom" Grossman 22 Nov 1936 and moved to Andover, NY where she was a long-time resident. Dorothy worked for many years for Dr. S. B. Scott in Andover and for Hyslip and Hyslip Insurance in Andover and Wellsville. In 2006 she moved to FL to be near her daughter, Barbara Hyslip, and her family.

Dorothy (Taft) Grossman was pre-deceased by her husband, by two sisters and a brother. She is survived by two daughters: Alura Fleming of Guilford, NY and Barbara Hyslip Hart of New Port Richey, FL; two sons, Robert F. Grossman of Williamsburg, VA and William Taft Grossman of Brockport, NY; and a nephew, David Lehmann of San Diego, CA. She is also survived by 9 of 10 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, 5 great-great grandchildren and several nieces. A private interment will be held in the Hillside Cemetery in Andover, NY.

Franklin Henry "Frank" Taft was the son of John Guy (James Henry, Benedict, Mijamin Mowry, Nathan, Mijamin, Benjamin, Robert) Taft.

Source: bgandbg@cox.net

Franklin Henry "Frank" and Laura (Martin) Taft with their four children: Robert, Bertha, Dorothy and Edna

Franklin Henry "Frank" Taft and his family

Franklin Henry "Frank" Taft was born 24 May 1888 in Hickory, Forest, PA, son of John Guy and Elizabeth (Kiffer) Taft, and died 29 Nov 1949 in Bradford, McKean. PA. He was buried in Tidioute Cemetery, Tidioute, PA. He married Laura Martin between 1910 and 1915. Laura Martin was born about 1890, daughter of Albert and Sophronia (Hopkins) Martin, and died in 1918. She was buried in Tidioute Cemetery, Tidioute, PA.

In the 1900 census for Limestone, PA Franklin was listed in his father's family. In 1910 still in his father's household he was single, and a teamster working with lumberwood as was his older brother Ernest. By 1930 Frank, a widower, was living in his brother Merle's household in Carroll, Chatuauqua, NY with his children Bertha and Dorothy. At this time he was a truck driver. In 1940 he was still in his brother's household, a truck driver, and listed with an eighth grade education.

The World War I draft registration card for 1917-1918 listed Franklin Henry Taft of Forest, PA as Caucasian, married, of slender build, tall, not bald with dark brown hair and brown eyes. In the World War II registration card for 1942 Franklin Henry Taft of Frewsburg, NY was aged 54 and 6'-1" in height, brown eyes, gray hair, light brown complexion, and 260 pounds.

See Frank cont. p 5

Frank cont. from p 4

Franklin Henry "Frank" and Laura (Martin) Taft had the following children:

i. Robert Taft was born about 1910 and died in 1917.

ii. Bertha E.Taft was born 26 Oct 1911 in PA and died 1 May 1996 in Wellsville, Allegany, NY. She was buried in Hillside Cemetery, Andover, NY. She was a long-time resident of Rochester, NY and apparently never married.

iii. Dorothy Detta Taft was born 18 Feb 1915 in Tidioute, Warren, PA and died 23 Jun 2017 in New Port Richey, FL. She married Wesley LeRoy "Tom" Grossman 22 Nov 1936. Wesley LeRoy "Tom" Grossman was born 21 Mar 1910 in Independence, NY, son of Jesse and Mary (Griggs) Grossman, and died 28 Jan 1986 in Rochester, NY. Wesley LeRoy "Tom" and Dorothy Detta (Taft) Grossman had the following children: Robert F., Alura, Barbara, and William Taft Grossman. See her obituary p 4.

iv. Edna Mae Taft was born 25 Oct 1916 probably in Tidioute, PA and died in Apr 1979 in Andover, NY. She married (1) Ferdinand Max Lehmann before 1940. Ferdinand Max Lehman was born about 1905 in NY, son of Ferdinand and Elizabeth Lehmann, and died at an unknown date. Ferdinand Max and Edna (Taft) Lehmann had the following child: David Lehmann. Edna (Taft) Lehmann married (2) Clarence E. "Mickey" Carson before 1959. Clarence E. "Mickey" Carson was born 16 Oct 1918, son of Edward C. and Anna Elizabeth (Carson) Carson, and died 1 Feb 1985 in Andover, NY. He was buried in Hillside Cemetery, Andover, NY. Clarence E. "Mickey" and Edna (Taft) Lehmann Carson had the following child: Melinda C. Carson, who died in infancy.
Clarence E. "Mickey" Carson married (1) Margaret Robinson before 1942. Clarence E. "Mickey" and Margaret (Robinson) Carson had the following child: James Raymond Carson who died in infancy.

In the 1940 census for Portville, Cattaraugus, NY F. Max Lehmann was a worker in a brewery and had two years of college education; his wife Edna had a high school education. They were renting a home at 91 North Main St. in Portville, having been in Olean, NY in 1935.
Clarence E. "Mickey" Carson, married, served in WW II in the army as a private, enlisting at Fort Dix, NJ on 18 Mar 1944. His occupation at the time was as a semiskilled driver of bus, taxi, truck and tractors.

Sources: bgandbg@cox.net, FindAGrave, US Censuses, Search.ancestry.com

Clarence E. "Mickey" Carson (Source: Ella 236)

You can't keep a good man away

Orvel Theodore "Ted" Taft is seen at one of the race tracks that were so important to the Taft family of Oklahoma and with his fans, the jockeys.

Source: John Robert Taft

No-Man's Land cont. from p 3

John M. Taft attended the Blue Grass grade school through ninth grade. After he moved to La Veta he worked as s rancher and stone mason. His special talents were in leather craft, woodcarving and playing the harmonica. In 1910, 1920 and 1930 they lived in Blue Grass, Beaver, OK and in 1940 they lived in Otto, Harper, OK. John M. Taft was listed as a ranch hand with an 8th grade education. The funeral for John M. Taft included a program of western and cowboy music rather than the usual spiritual hymns. "Empty Saddles" and "Headin' for the Last Roundup" were featured songs.

3. John Whitcomb Taft (father of John McKinley Taft) was born 12 Dec 1874 in Clifton, IL, son of Wallace Whitcomb and Lydia Foster (Stiles) Taft, and died 24 Sep 1937 in La Verne, Beaver, OK. He was buried in Madison Cemetery, Slapout, Beaver, OK (Row #85). He married Mary Amelia "Amelia" Stanley in Jun 1898 in Beaver Co., OK, at the bride's father's home. Mary Amelia "Amelia" Stanley was born 29 Sep 1874 in Butler Co., KS, daughter of John and Mary Stanley, and died in 1928 in LaVerne, Beaver, OK. She was buried in Madison Cemetery, Slapout, OK (Row E # 83). John Whitcomb and Mary Amelia "Amelia" (Stanley) Taft had the following children: Florence Agnes, **John McKinley "Johnny" (see p. 3),** Esther A. Taft, Carl Stanley, William Horace, and Ruth E. Taft.

5. Wallace Whitcomb Taft, (father of John Whitcomb Taft), was born 31 May 1836 in Swanzey, Cheshire, NH, son of Aquila Ramsdell and Ruhamah Whitcomb (Goodhue) Taft, and died 14 May 1891 in Morenci, Graham, AZ. He was buried in Clifton, Graham, AZ. He married Lydia Foster Stiles who was born 30 Jul 1839 in Worcester, Worcester, MA, daughter of Charles and Lucy M. (Williams) Stiles, and died 31 Mar 1915 in Speermore, Beaver, OK. She was buried in Madison Cemetery, Slapout, Beaver, OK (Row 1 #23). Wallace Whitcomb and Lydia Foster (Stiles) Taft had the following children: Emily Louisa, Lucy Jane, **Charles Wallace whose son was Leonard Charles Taft (see p 7)**, Frederick William, Mary Frances, **John Whitcomb (see above)**, **Alice Gertrude** (who wrote the short note on the occasion of the birth of John Robert Taft and the booklet presented at the GIG-BAR reunion, Minnie Lydia, and **Frank Stiles Taft whose sons were Robert L. Taft (see p 8) and Orvel Theodore "Ted" Taft (see photos p 5)**.

Wallace Whitcomb Taft had moved from NH to Chebanse, IL by 1860 where he was a farmer. In 1870 he was a hardware manufacturer but by 1880 had moved to Centerville, KS and in 1890 had relocated to District 1, OK. After the death of her husband Lydia Taft lived in Blue Grass, OK and her father-in-law had joined the family. She moved before 1910 into the home of her son, Frederick W. Taft, who was a farmer and merchant. Florence Agnes Taft wrote a letter in 1996 about her grandmother as follows:

> *"My grandmother [Lydia Foster Stiles Taft] was an incredibly wonderful woman of sharp intellect and great goodness of heart, and probably the most important person in my life as far as my own development is concerned: we were very close during my childhood and I share so many of her traits. My grandmother was always greatly interested in genealogy and family history and being a wonderful storyteller she imbued me with those interests also as she recounted her experiences. After the terrible financial reverses and ruin her father suffered, the family which had been well educated and cultured in the Chicago area fled west and became poverty-stricken settlers. This made for an interesting mix of people in Oklahoma Territory, and my grandmother and her mother both cherished and practiced the lady-hood of well-born women throughout their lives despite the poverty and harsh conditions under which both of them lived. Both had husbands who for various reasons suffered financial disasters, Wallace's was quick and extreme, while Norval's was leisurely and steadily declining. But the effect was the same for both women: they remained highly intellectual and cultured, had great goodness of heart and a deep yet humorous nature, and labored inordinately hard throughout their lives just to keep body and soul and their family together. My grandmother was an extremely talented painter who never had money for supplies, as she was also an extremely talented pianist who never owned her own piano. Yet her spirit remained sweet and sunny and she expressed no bitterness or regrets and recriminations. An inspiring Lady!"*

Lt. Col. Leonard Charles Taft

Not all the Taft folks remained in Oklahoma. Some spent their lives elsewhere but still reflected the strength and character that grew from the life in panhandle.

Lt. Col. Leonard Charles Taft, born Charles Leonard, was born 27 Aug 1924 in Beaver Co., OK on the GIG-BAR Ranch, son of Charles Wallace and Daisy May (Woods) Taft, and died 7 Sep 2006 in Dayton Beach, Volusia, FL. He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA. He married (1) Norma Elaine Marchert 6 Mar 1948 in Hermando, MS. Norma Elaine Marchert was born 16 May 1926 in Chicago, IL, daughter of Frederick and Norma Marchert, and died 11 Mar 1992 in Arlington, VA. Lt. Col. Leonard Charles and Norma Elaine (Marchert) Taft had the following children: Norma Elaine Marchert, Leonard Charles, Leonore, Kathryn May, Alicyn, Fredrick,and Lawrence Taft. He married (2) Bettyanne (Emerick) Diamond after 1992.

Leonard Charles Taft "enlisted in the Marine Corps as a Private shortly after graduating from Continental, OH High School in 1942. He served his country for 25 years including World War II, the Korean War (where he was a prisoner of war for 26 months and was "The Last Man Out" during the "Big Switch" prisoner exchange of 6 Sep 1953) and in the Vietnam War, where his last assignment was as Commanding Officer of the VMA-223 (a jet attack squadron). Over the years he had flown aboard numerous aircraft carriers in both propeller and jet aircraft. He flew 30 some missions in Korea and 138 missions in Vietnam. Though proud of his service to his country, he was hesitant in speaking of it. The record, however, shows he was awarded 14 different medals with two to eight stars for additional awards for the same medal, including the Purple Heart. He always considered helping his wife, Norma Elaine Marchert Taft, raise their seven children to be honest, reliable, dependable, hardworking, self-reliant citizens as the major noteworthy accomplishment of his life… His heroes had always been heroines, i.e., women - and more especially Mothers... He was a member of the American Legion Post #120, Holly Hill, and a Loyal Member of Moose Lodge #1263, Daytona Beach."

Source: www.legacy.com from Daytona Beach (FL) News-Journal

In Memoriam

Corella Inez (Blakely) Ferm

Corella Inez (Blakely) Ferm of 3282 Theresa Ln, Lafayette, CA was born 7 Aug 1924, daughter of Mark Eugene and Nettie Abigail "Nettie" (Taft) Blakely, and died 12 Aug 2016 in Lafayette, CA. Corella Blakely graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School in San Francisco, CA in 1942 where she had been president of the CSF, vice president of the Block "L," and an active member of the Service Society. Her aim was to be a mathematician. She graduated from UCAL Berkeley with a degree in business administration and then did graduate work at the University of New Mexico. Corella Blakely worked as a statistical clerk and a statistical assistant for the University of New Mexico beginning in 1951.

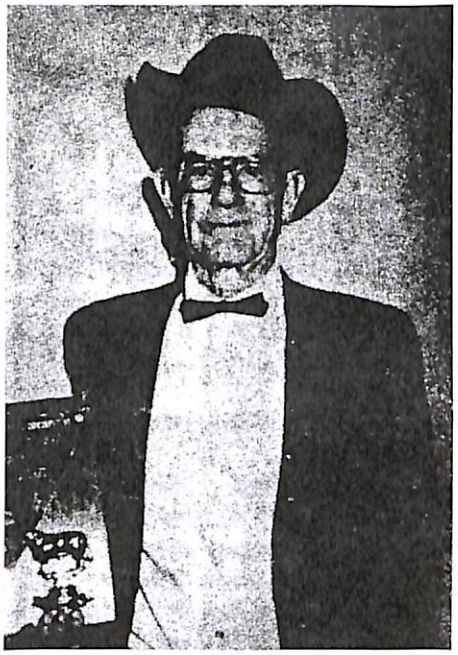
Corella Blakely married Dr. Richard L. Ferm 23 Jan 1953 in Hermosa, NM. Richard L. Ferm was an assistant professor of chemical engineering and did graduate work at the University of KS. He presented a paper on "Synthetic Latex-Soil Slurry: a New Adobe Preservation Technique" to the 6th International Conference on the Conservation of Earthen Architecture in 1990. Dr. Ferm had been an associate professor in the chemical engineering department at UNM but moved to CA in 1955 to work for the CA Research Corp., a research division of Standard Oil of CA. In 1984 he founded the Richard L. Ferm Company, categorized as a consulting business in chemical analysis, in Lafayette, CA.

Corella Ferm leaves her husband Richard L Ferm, her children Laurel J (Douglas) Bullock, and Joel E. Ferm, and a brother Mark E. Blakely. She was predeceased by her parents and a son Andrew Ferm.

Nettie Abigail "Nettie" Taft was the daughter of Luella Blanchard and Charles Sumner (Henry Millins, Samuel Wilson, Geneay, Nathaniel, Thomas, Thomas, Robert) Taft.

Sources: www.e-yearbook.com, www.ancestry.com, repository.unm.edu, Alburquerque (NM) Journal, 9 Jan 1953, 8 Jun 1955, listings.findthecompany.com, www.manta.com, books.google, com, Barbara Krueger

"Bob Taft who was a legend in His Own Time – a Jewel"



Robert L. Taft was born 11 Jan 1906 in OK, son of Frank S. and Mae Gertrude (Petty) Taft, and died 13 Jun 1981 in Harper Co. Hospital, Buffalo, Beaver Co., OK. He was buried in Madison Cemetery, Slapout, OK (Row E #96d). He married Ida S. Moore who was born 31 Dec 1913 in OK, daughter of Luther W. and Ida S. Moore, and died 30 Jun 2001 in Slapout, OK. Robert L. and Ida Taft had the following children: Philip A. and Frances M. Taft.

Robert L. Taft grew up in Blue Grass, OK where his grandparents had first settled before OK gained statehood. He was a well-known cattleman, rope twirler, and rancher who was a "self-made man, humorist and excellent story teller..."

The Harper County Journal (OK) of 18 Jun 1981 noted the passing of Bob Taft as follows:

"A segment of history passed Saturday with the death of a Laverne rancher. Robert Taft, 75, took with him an interesting legacy, along with an ability to embellish a good story to its zenith. Known popularly as Bob, Taft proved to be a jewel, a little unpolished here and there, but nevertheless a special friend to all who knew him. He now rests in the Madison Cemetery, west of Laverne, beside a son who was an invalid until his death.

"The Taft story for Beaver area began with his grandfather George Washington Petty who homesteaded land six miles west and three south of the present town of Laverne. Petty was enroute to Texas where he could buy land for $1 an acre. But he and his wife Deborah after traveling three weeks by covered wagon from Casey, KS camped on a little creek where they found plenty of wood, water and wild game. The land, however, was so poor that no one claimed it during the run into Oklahoma territory. Petty filed his claim and was granted the homestead. The Pettys had a daughter, Mae, who was the first white girl born in the territory called No Man's Land. After her birth in 1888, cowhands on the Texas cattle drives to Dodge City would stop at the ranch to see the white baby. Petty named the ranch Gig-Bar, and registered the brand at Beaver in 1888 for a cost of $1.25. Taft found the cost when the brand was transferred to him in 1938, when he bought the ranch from the family.

"Taft was born in the panhandle and lived all his life in the Madison community, and attended the Blue Grass school. Following his father's death in 1925, Taft, the eldest of eight children, helped his mother rear the brothers and sisters. Then he traveled the countryside regularly, attending dances, and having an enjoyable time. Folks tell the story that if he felt extra good he could and would recite Shakespeare's works. Not all his time was spent dancing, for he did his share of hard work, gaining a reputation as a quality Hereford breeder. He and a friend, Milton Messner, began holding registered Hereford sales annually in 1959, going to the sales facilities at Buffalo. Since 1972 they had held their sales at the Messner ranch southwest of Laverne. Taft enjoyed the sales as they gave him opportunities to meet and share camaraderie with his many friends.

"He took pride in his ranching operations, and was a member of the Oklahoma Hereford Association. During the Association's state convention in Mar 1979, Taft was chosen Hereford Man of the Year, a distinction which pleased him greatly. Ranching duties had mostly been turned over to his grandson, Randy Prophet, and they ran 140 registered Hereford cows on 2,500 acres.

"Before Taft realized the gravity of his illness he decided to share his money of later years with friends and others, and constructed the Gig-Bar Recreation Center and Supper Club, which is being operated by his son-in-law Johnny Prophet and daughter Frances. He expressed the wish that his beloved center at the ranch headquarters not be closed down when he was no longer there. The family sees this as a memorial to a man beloved by folks who knew him."

Oklahoma
Historical
Society ©

Ranch Rodeo

"A working cowboy's everyday duties included riding, roping, branding, horse breaking, and the like, and these activities often served also as his pastime. In the spring, when various ranches cooperated in the roundup, men competed informally, wagering on the fastest roper, the best horse breaker. In Oklahoma.. large ranches often encouraged 'cowboy contests' in roping, riding, and horse breaking, and the sport of rodeo evolved from them in the late nineteenth century.

"Often called 'round-ups' or 'cowpuncher reunions' at first, these informal rodeos were later promoted as 'frontier days' or 'pioneer days' by canny officials in nearby towns. The Dewey Roundup, held since 1908, is an example.

"Many early-day professional rodeo cowboys started in ranch rodeos or community rodeos. Traveling extravaganzas like the Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Wild West show were not ranch rodeos; the cowboys were paid performers. As rodeos became more organized, and prizes and prize money became available, a rodeo circuit developed. In the 1930s and 1940s the sport became increasingly professionalized, with organizers, entry fees, and livestock contractors. Working cowboys (those who really did ranch work for a living) were correspondingly excluded from the traveling circuit.

"Ranch rodeos, however, remained popular pastimes for Oklahoma's working cowboys well into the twenty-first century. The various competitive categories in ranch rodeo have always reflected the everyday chores associated with cattle raising… Like regular ranch work, the ranch rodeo emphasizes all-around skills and teamwork. Events usually include calf 'branding' (using chalk), steer 'mugging' (throwing and tying a yearling steer), wild cow milking, team roping, and team penning. Occasionally there are rough stock (bucking) events and horse racing…

"Like professional rodeos, local roundup clubs, riding clubs, and roping clubs, Oklahoma's ranch rodeos are still a dynamic part of the state's cultural landscape. Ranch rodeo preserves the history of early Oklahoma's cattle-raising economy and also graphically illustrates a conscious effort to maintain rural values and traditions in spite of a century of ever-increasing urbanization."

Sources: www.okhistory.org: Ranch Rodeo by Dianna Everett

Taft Family Association Officers

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Annual dues of $8 per family are due and payable each year on or before June.
(Your dues are paid through the year on your mailing label.)